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JOAN MELLEN

An Interview with Gillo Pontecorvo

*The director of **THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS**, which has become a classic because of its astonishingly newsreel-like reconstruction of the Algerian independence struggle, spoke with Joan Mellen in English. His remarks have been slightly abridged for publication.*

As a Marxist, what has attracted you to making films about the colonial revolution rather than films about struggles in industrialized countries?

I have made so few films that my answer must be "by accident." I make one film every four or five years. In all, I have made four films.* I was also supposed to make a film about a section of Fiat called "Confinio Fiat," where they put all the politically active workers during the Scelba government and the entire series of center governments which brought a great repression to Italy. It wasn't shot for a number of reasons. But I might have done that film instead of

Algiers. The fight of oppressed people against colonialism, in any case, interests me because it's one of the most difficult moments of the human condition. And because our entire civilization is constructed within this matrix. On the shoulders of colonial people, we draw all our strengths. And our manner of thinking and our culture depend always to a greater or smaller degree on this fact. Even if you don't have colonies, your manner of thinking, your culture, derives from the fact that Americans came from Europe . . . I was also going to make a film last year about Pinelli, the anarchist who "fell" to his death from police headquarters. I was so stupid, I let someone who had seen *Sacco and Vanzetti* convince me that the theme was too

**The Long Blue Road* (1957); *Kapo* (1959); *The Battle of Algiers* (1965); *Burn!* (1969)

close. Now, I'm furious not to have done it. But it's too late to make this film because a few days ago we had another incident (the murder of Calebresi, the police officer implicated in the Pinelli death) . . . One year ago the event seemed as if it were finished and you could handle it. But now many other things have happened.

What were some of the difficulties in shooting Battle of Algiers? Was it hard to get people to work with you? Were you assisted by the Boumedienne government?

Getting people to work with us was more the achievement of the Algerian co-producer than the government. From the government we had the normal things, but these were more easily obtained than anywhere else when you want to shoot in a street. You must have a permit and they give it very promptly. What was more useful was that they gave us the possibility of using some soldiers in the mass scenes. The Algerian and Italian producers were obliged to pay, but less than usual. We had excellent collaboration with the people who were brought to work with us. Even though they were paid, they participated more than the usual extras . . . it was a most interesting experience because we went there with a very small crew. The Italian producer to whom I brought this subject told me that he would make any film I wanted, but that this project was impossible. It meant "making a film without any meaning, in black and white, without actors and without a story." He said that "the Italian people don't care about black people." I told him I am sorry, but Algerians are white like you. In fact, the Italian people were very touched by the war in Algeria because both Algeria and France are so close to us. Still, they didn't want to make the film. One producer said, "only because it is you, I will give a minimum guarantee of 45 million lira (\$80,000)"—which is nothing. The film earned this amount in Italy in six days!

The crew was so light and we had so little money that we began the film without even a script girl, thinking we could find one there. After one month we had to call a script girl from Rome because of the confusion in the footage

caused by the young Algerian girl . . . In the other branches of work we did much better. For instance, we had only one chief electrician and when we arrived we asked people who usually put electricity in houses to work with us. Our electrician began to teach them what they must know to work in films. The Algerians were very clever and very rapid learners. After a short time we had nearly a normal crew. The same thing was done by Gatti, the photographer, who chose three young men and worked with them. They took notes and made little designs of where the lights should be, scene by scene. I can remember the name of a young man who is now a good photographer there, Ali Maroc. He was working and trying to learn exactly as if he were in a course of cinematography. And it was very easy for Gatti because he likes this kind of situation. In any case it was very useful that the crew was so compact. We did a lot of work that usually presupposes an enormous crew—the mass scenes for example. We saved money because we did things in a nontraditional way.

It is clear that you have made a film on the side of Algerian independence. But is this undermined in any way by treating the violence committed by Algerians and French in a one-to-one relationship? You show the Algerians killing someone, then the French retaliating, then the Algerians, etc., whereas in the historical situation the French killed hundreds of thousands more than the Algerians, including women and children. There is only one moment in the film where we get a sense of this, when Ben M'Hidi says, "Give us your napalm and we'll give you our women's baskets."

This happens in an extremely tense moment of the film and it creates a proper balance of the problem. I thought it was enough. He says it at the moment toward which all the dramaturgy has been pointing. Then you see the Algerian people being tortured and you hear the musical motif of Ali La Pointe. You feel the difference between the French and the Algerians who are defending themselves with anything they have.

There is another more important point. I think it is insignificant to say, "One side killed ten, the other killed two." The problem is that

they are in a situation in which the only factor is oppression. Then they begin to fight and I don't believe that when people fight, some fight hard and some fight less hard. The Algerians castrated people and also committed torture. You must judge who is historically condemned and who is right. And to give the feeling that you identify with those who are right. At the beginning I wanted to call the film by another name, a biblical term, "to give birth in sorrow." But my associate producer said, "You are mad, no one will go and see it with this dull title." But this title gives an indication of my intention. The birth of a nation happens with pain on both sides, although one side has cause and the other not . . . when the torture became theorized and scientific, it became an important moment of the war, and for this reason we began the film with torture. Then we didn't persist in showing it because our aim was not to put the accent on the repression, but on something more worthwhile, in homage to the people who fight for freedom. We didn't care if you could find sadistic people among the paratroopers; it is not interesting. It is much more interesting to show that you could find among them some who had ideas, confused ideas taken from their experience in Indochina and from half-digested books they read. In any case if you put a colonel who is completely normal and obliged by the historical context to do something, you condemn the one who sent him, *il mandante*. This is the logic of colonialism. . . .

Was Battle of Algeria shot with any degree of continuity?

No, for many reasons of organization. When you have crowds, you must shoot all the crowd scenes to spend less money. The crowd scenes which generally seem credible enough, and even spontaneous, are the most organized part of the whole film. Because we did not have a very long time to shoot, we drew all the movements of the crowd with chalk on the actual pavement, "action 1, 2, or 3, this group goes around," etc. This is how we did the great crowd scene, the demonstration down the stairs. When this became automatic, I no longer looked at it and my assistant controlled it when we shot . . . I took

the five, ten, fifteen people who were nearest to the camera and worked only with them. I didn't even look at the others. I looked to see if the expression on their faces was right. A crowd scene can be spoiled if the expression of only one person is not exactly what you want. It is the person two meters from the camera who conveys the feeling and determines whether the scene is right or not. In this way you create the feeling of a stolen moment during an actual happening. If you don't have this kind of control, you always have two or three people who are looking the wrong way and the scene is spoiled.

Were your nonprofessional actors familiar with the actual Battle of Algiers? Were they participants in the historical incidents described in the film?

No, because the complexion of the people of Algiers had changed completely. After the victory many people arrived from the rural areas who didn't know what had happened in Algiers. They occupied the houses in the Casbah vacated by the others who were now living in the better part of the town, where the Europeans had lived before. We shot principally with them for a simple economic reason: they needed the money and were happy to work with us. They didn't know exactly what had happened, but they were in favor of what had happened.

You asked me before about the FLN leader in Tunis who didn't know that the demonstrations in 1960 were about to take place. We wanted to give the feeling that when the river begins to flow, nothing can stop it, even if something gives the appearance of stopping it. The finale of the film, the music which is the theme of Ali, is not finished, but open-ended music. It is left open to give the sense that it is not only for Algiers, but for all people in this condition. The condition goes on not only in Algeria.

How much of the original script changed from the time it was written to the final version? I read somewhere that you changed the scene in which the three Algerian women transform themselves into French women, that there was originally dialogue in this scene.

Again I am sorry to bore you with music, but for me the roots of a film are always in music.

I was not happy with this scene when I was preparing the script with Franco Solinas. He felt one way, I didn't feel that way. But I had nothing to propose in place of what we had. Sometimes you don't like something, but you have no alternative. The terrible day in which I was supposed to shoot this scene arrived. We began at 8 o'clock and by one o'clock we had not shot anything. In the script there was a joke among the girls waiting for Djafar, a light moment which I felt was very false. It broke the unity of the film. Finally, because I was desperate, I said that in an hour we must begin to shoot. We went to eat and I was beside myself. I ate alone without the crew thinking of how I could shoot the scene . . . finally I thought of a percussion piece I had recorded on a cassette machine before the beginning of the film . . . I decided to try this because I thought it was very beautiful. Suddenly I said, "It's very easy, it's done." I cut all the dialogue; who cares about the dialogue? I didn't have the girls laugh; I made the scene very tense. And the rehearsal was with this music, but with loudspeakers, very loud. Immediately it generated a terrible tension, not only for me, but for the three girls in the scene, who were not professionals but picked up in the street. They began to feel it. The scene became very short and, I think, moving. In one hour we had done the whole scene. It was very, very satisfying for me.

Was The Battle of Algiers popular in Algeria?

I have heard that the first time the film was shown many wounded people went to see it. It was the greatest box-office success ever. But this was to be expected. It didn't depend on the film. Rather, it was because it tells the story of the Algerian people for the first time.

Among political people some made criticisms. And even this depended on the fact that after liberation many groups were fighting for personal power. Those who were far from the group which co-produced the film (The Casbah Film Company and Yacef Saadi, military commander for the autonomous zone of Algiers during the Battle of Algiers), objected on two grounds: that the film was too kind to the French and that we showed someone who was alive,

Yacef Saadi, whose enemies were against this. They were not very profound criticisms, but sometimes they were very severe. They depended on one's political position. But the film was an obvious success, the first film about the struggle for national liberation.

When was The Battle of Algiers finally shown in France?

It was shown first in Italy, because the film is an Italo-Algerian coproduction. Second, or at nearly the same time, it was shown in Algeria. In France the producers of the film did not even try to show it for three years because the situation was so tense that we were sure it was impossible. The French delegation had walked out of the Venice festival when the film was shown. It was shown in France finally one year ago. We had the permission of the censor. We took great precautions for the opening because we were afraid of trouble. We had more than fifty private showings for political and cultural per-



sonalities and for journalists. And we had a marvellous reception that we would never have believed possible. Even the newspapers said marvellous things from positions that might well be dangerous. They said that the film doesn't offend France. So we were very hopeful.

Three large theaters were ready to open the film when they received threats telling the managers of the theaters that "we are going to kill you, your wife, and your children." These men, who were not paid to be killed, said "No, thank

you.” They didn’t open the film. So for another six or seven months after having had the approval of the censor, the film did not open. They tried to open it in rural areas outside of Paris, where there were students and workers, but even there the fascists put bombs in the theater three times and huge quantities of dirt were thrown on the screen. Later the French director Louis Malle took the matter into his own hands and brought about the showing of the film.

The use of sound, and music in particular, is one of the most outstanding qualities of your films.

The rapport between music and image for me is extremely important. First of all because the only thing I like deeply in my life is music—more than movies. I wanted to become a composer, but for economic reasons I could not, because you must have enough money to study for eight years, eight hours each day, to become the director of an orchestra or a composer. And so I began to study music when I was already too old. I worked with a friend, a French composer of atonal music named Leibowitz. I would begin from time to time for three months and I would always stop for financial reasons.

Perhaps it seems strange, but movies fulfill some of the desires which impel me to write music; not all, but some. The most beautiful moment for me in movies is when you begin to make the sound. At this moment I am really happy. For all my documentary films I wrote the music. “Wrote” is of course overstated because I can’t write, I haven’t studied. I can play and discuss with another composer. I say “another” because I am in this strange Italian category “melodist.” In Italy there are two categories, melodist and composer. A “melodist-composer” can’t sign something alone, and this is right because he must have someone who can do the orchestration and write the music. But I have collaborated on the music in all my films.

The only one in which I have not done this is *Queimada*, (*Burn!*). We had only two months in which to do the editing and they came close to Christmas when the film had to open. For superstitious reasons I invented a little theme. When the child puts his hands up, followed by

a long shot of the sugar cane fields on fire, there are a few notes, a *nota tenuta* that I wrote. Superstitiously I put this in during the recording. We put away what had been written for that moment in the film. I played it on the piano and the orchestra played it immediately after. Because in all my films I had done some of the music, I was afraid not to have done it in this film as well.

I think that any director begins with a little fear the morning when he goes to the set to shoot. But I go with great fear. Sometimes I arrive without knowing where to put the camera and what to do with it. If I’ve thought of the scene before and tried to compose the theme of the music, if I have found this theme, my behavior is completely different. I become extremely sure of myself and I know exactly what to do or not to do. When I discover the music, it is as if one were going in the dark on the stairs, and you had something to hold onto so that you could be sure and not hesitate. The same thing is true for me when I have the music, the sound. I know, for instance, that I can stay on this face just a little more than usual or just a little less because you must do this and not another thing. . . .

When I have no music, I don’t know. I wait. It is always an embarrassing situation when you arrive and don’t know how to place the camera, what to do, because a thousand solutions may be correct. The crew creates a strange silence so as not to disturb you. And this silence disturbs you much more because you know that they are waiting . . . Apart from the story that any movie has to tell, there is sometimes, although not always, another story—which tells the inner story: the hope, the sorrow, the fragility of happiness or hope, the absurd, the great themes of the human condition. For me when I am ready to tell this second story, to express its presence, I depend very often on music. I don’t want to make a theory of this. I speak only of what happens to me, what I experience personally. I know that many people believe that music is something joined, tacked onto the imagined work unjustifiably. Each person expresses himself in very different ways. When I express my-

self, it comes principally from the music . . . sometimes the imagination seems completely dead, when you write or when you shoot; it can happen at any moment. The camera that you have put in front of a face is unable to find the necessary emotion to go beyond the banality of this face to find underneath the person's real humanity. I am able to create this difficult contact between you and the exterior world, you and other people, you and the difficulties of the human condition thanks only to the music.

For this reason, for me, music is extremely important and it is important not only for the counterpoint between music and the image, sound and the image, but really for providing a key to communication. And to communicate means to understand people. And so for me if films were done without music, I would probably do some other kind of work. And when I say music, of course I don't mean only music, but silence, all that is constructed with sound—noise, moments of rhythm, all this.

There is also another mania in my work, photography. I consider that in films until now we all, all directors, have used photography in a passive way. If you really pay attention, between good photography and mediocre photography in movies there is not a great difference. In a way both are always dominated by objectivity. This is not creative photography, but passive. If instead you visit an exposition of photographs or look in a library book about photography, you will see how much they try to find new ways and how much difference there is between one photography and another. So I think this is one of the future ways in which movies can develop. And in a little, little, little way, extremely little, I have tried not to be passive in my use of the camera.

In *Kapo* and *The Battle of Algiers* we made a lot of tests before beginning to create a granular effect and to gain a feeling of truth. We wanted to recreate the reality that the majority of people know, the reality that reaches them through the mass media, through television. On television they use certain kinds of lenses and they use them generally because if there is a fire or shooting, the men who work for television

stay as far away from the action as they can; they need a telephoto lens. And granular effects come from the fact that very often newsreels are "contratype," using a negative made from a positive because the original has been lost. And so the problem for me was to find something which looks like reality as people know it through the mass media, without being so sloppy and so ugly.



You can't go on for two hours with the bad quality that you can accept in newsreels. I was seeking a photography that resembled newsreels, but without these weaknesses. In *Kapo* we achieved this, but not very well. In *Algiers* it was better because we realized that it is not effective to do it all in the laboratory later. You must prepare beforehand. Certain kinds of developing baths produce granularity, but the same kind of baths also provide great contrast. To give only one example, you must shoot with a very soft stock and diffuse the light because later the extent of the contrast will be too great because of the methods you must use. This is only one of the thousands of problems involved in this kind of photography. Another difficulty is that if you always shoot with diffused light, covering the sun with filters, you risk photography without vitality. I tried these things to have the totality of the frame in soft light. And there is a point of focus with a concentration of light which doesn't cause too much contrast but is sharp enough.

For the "Jesus Christ" [the projected new film], the problem is very much more difficult. All the Visions—the Jungian part of the film, the subconscious presence, not only in Jesus Christ, but in all the oppressed people of this period—are inevitably contaminated visually by the daily reality people are simultaneously experiencing. For the part of the film that shows sad faces, poor houses, killing, the oppression of Romans and difficulties of life in general, I wish to have photography like that of *Algiers* which, now that I have done it, is very easy to do, like a documentary. But for the other I need something completely different.

I want to fight against the dictatorship of the lens. What makes a painter so free and what constrains us so much is that his art passes only through his hand and his eye, while we must pass through something, the camera, which makes us prisoners of reality. Try to fight against him. He is a terrible enemy. It may seem strange, since we have not yet finished the script, but I am already making photographic tests for my new film, to try to have the Visions, the scenes for example in which we want to create the impression that God is speaking to someone, as free as a painter might have them. We want to convey the presence of a subconscious typical of a certain ethnic group in an intense existential situation.

For this I am looking for something resembling the pointillism of the painter Seurat where the very strong, burning white devours the rest of the design. I am looking for something which derives from two very different painters who are nonetheless close to each other: Hieronymus Bosch and the Goya of his "dark painting" (*la pintura de la quinta del sordo*). This is a magic painting with strange faces of peasants and strange shapes. But the Goya and Bosch will be only for the Vision part of the film.

The goal is to allow freer possibilities for the photography. And the best result I have found so far comes from shooting in 16mm, very overexposed 16mm. But this is only the first attempt. Perhaps we will shoot in some different way. It is not useful to try any experiments until you solve the problem of the photography.

You must surmount this problem. Unhappily.

Why have you chosen the figure of Jesus as the focus of your next film? It seems a surprising choice since Battle of Algiers and even Queimada indicate a commitment to struggles in the present. One would expect this subject of Pasolini, but not of you.

Pasolini made a very valuable film in *The Gospel According To St. Matthew*. He was dealing with a "sediment" which was deposited in the popular mind over a period of 2,000 years—and he accomplished this. We are trying something different . . . to speak of the historical Christ. What interests me is the antiauthoritarian component which was very strong in Christ. I believe that even if Christ sought to move solely on a religious plane, despite his idea of himself and of what he was doing, he was really deeply revolutionary. He was in opposition to the old authoritarian and repressive society, the Jewish society of this period from which he drew his origins. I am interested in the process by which society, any kind of society, arrives at a point of total crisis, as has ours today.

The old slave society was ready to collapse and give way to the middle ages. It was near its end and it was time to prepare a new kind of society. When a society is at this point, it very often happens that men, thinking that they are advancing traditional ways, do exactly the opposite and prepare what we generally call new values. This is characteristic of that period. Therefore, I call my film not the story of Jesus Christ, but *Time of the World's End*. It is a biblical term, but for me it conveys a time of vast change. I find a great similarity with our period of total crisis, with its expectancy of new values, awaiting even a new way to approach the revolution.

We are living after the occurrence of certain deceptions, after the "parthenogenetic" attempt of the socialist revolution to happen all at once and by itself, full grown, like the supposed virgin birth of the Messiah. After a certain disillusionment we are seeking a new way of looking at revolution, at change and at the birth of new values. With this approach we can encompass the "new left," many Spontaneist movements,

even the Jesus movement which has turned in a bad direction. But all this ferment means that the searching process is going on. Some of these groups are confused, but the soil from which they come is the same. And in this way I find great similarity between the period of *Time of the World's End* and now.

The conception of Sir William Walker in Burn!, played by Marlon Brando, is confusing. Why would the Royal Sugar interests choose to represent them a person who has become so dissolute, who has fist fights in the slums, an alcoholic? Yet despite what seems an inconsistency in the conception of the character, Brando carries the ideas of the film and you use many, many close-ups of him.

Because with one expression, he conveys more than ten pages of dialogue. And he is the only one who can do it. His eyes simultaneously express sadness, irony, skepticism, and the fact that he is tired . . . Walker changed because he discovered that there was nothing behind the side he helped. The same thing happened to many intellectuals after the last war, the deception growing inside them and the emptiness at the same time.

Men like Walker, full of vitality and action, then change the direction of this vitality. They go to sea, buy a boat, drink, beat people up. They don't believe in anything. When they ask him to return to Queimada, he wants to go because he liked his youth, he liked Jose Dolores, and he needed money . . . He does the same things he did before, but like a mercenary, without belief in anything.

Then, at the end of the film—this person who doesn't believe in anything cannot understand those who do.

His defeat is a comparison between himself and Dolores, who grows up. His development symbolizes the maturing of the third world, a moral growth which continues to the moment when Jose Dolores refuses to speak any longer to Walker. Walker is defeated because he can no longer manipulate. His consciousness is that of the European who can be very friendly, but who must always be the one who decides. Walker encounters, in contrast to his emptiness, some-

one who is full of purpose. And this is his great defeat.

This is why he wants to free Jose Dolores, not only because he is his friend, but because if Jose Dolores escapes, he will not feel so dirty. He is desperate when Dolores refuses. He sees his own emptiness before his eyes. And you know we had to stop shooting when we came to this scene because Brando was afraid. It may appear strange, but Brando, because of his sensibility, after years and years of sets, after years and years of success, is very often afraid of difficult scenes, extremely afraid. And he is tense and nervous when he is in such a situation. In this situation he was not able to function.

The dialogue was originally longer. And suddenly the same thing occurred that happened when the girls changed their appearances in *The Battle of Algiers* and we cut out all the dialogue. I told someone to go buy a recording of Cantata 156 of Bach, because I knew that it gives the exact movement of this scene. And I cut all the dialogue. Without saying anything to Brando, I said we will shoot now, we have waited too long, we will try to shoot. I put the music on at the moment when I wanted him to open his arms and express his sense of emptiness. I put on the music without telling him. I said only "Don't say the last part of the dialogue." He agreed. He was happy to do this; he said it was stupid to use too much dialogue. From this moment he was so moved by the music that he did the scene in a marvelous way. When he finished the scene, the whole crew applauded. It was more effective there than on the screen later. The sudden tension we obtained was surprising. And Brando said this was the first time he had seen two pages of dialogue replaced by music. But he was happy.

Were you as satisfied with the use of nonprofessional actors in Burn! as you had been in The Battle of Algiers? Which of the people were professionals?

Only two, Teddy Sanchez (Renato Salvatori) and Brando. Prada was President of Caritas for Colombia and a lawyer. He was very surprised when I met him and said, "Do you want to play in my film?" He was happy to do it.

And another nonprofessional was Mr. Shelton, who in reality is the administrator for British Petroleum for Colombia. It is not very difficult to make people act, not in the theater, but in movies. You must consider all the help the lenses, the distance of the camera, the movement of the camera, the position of the camera can give you.

At the beginning Evaristo Marquez (Jose Dolores) was completely unable to do anything. I had not even done a test with him because I liked his face so much. I thought his face was perfect for what we wanted. I was afraid to be afraid. I was afraid that if I made a test and he wasn't good, I wouldn't use him. So I risked it. And after fifteen days I was so desperate that I called my producer saying that despite what I have always said, namely that anyone can play in movies, this is an exception. Because he is completely unable to move, even to turn around. Yet it's a disaster to re-shoot fifteen days of work. So we stopped shooting with him. I changed the program, shooting all the scenes with other people during the day. During the evening, until I fell asleep, I tried to work with him, explaining the ABC's of what we were asking. I was helped by Salvatori, an Italian actor who would very kindly repeat the text during the day when he himself was not shooting. My wife and the script girl also helped Marquez with his lines. We were all around him. I played his whole part a thousand times. After ten days he was really better. We have in the film the first scene we shot with him which was not good, but everything he did later is of a completely different quality.

At the beginning we constructed his performance in a mechanical way. If I wanted a glance of irony, I would change his position in the scene. I put the camera higher and on his face so that he was obliged while looking at the camera or at Brando to have his head down. The problem was for him to remember to put his head down during the previous phrase. The script girl, who was out of the frame, touched his leg at the moment when he had to put his head down so that he would be able to do it a second later. The next problem arose because

as soon as she touched him, he remembered that he had to do something. But instead of doing it, he would quickly put his head down. . . . To get him to glance we would direct his attention first to one spot, then to another, mechanically. And Brando said "If you are successful with this scene, I know someone who will turn over in his grave—Stanislavsky." Later, when Marquez began to play almost well, Brando said, "now Stanislavsky is spinning in his grave. . . ."

The scene in which Jose Dolores returns to his people, defeated, smiling sadly at the people who are so glad to see him, was done with the Stanislavsky method. We tried to make Marquez recall, by analogy, something he had felt in his youth, to reproduce this feeling. So we started from the Stone Age and finished in the sophisticated age of Stanislavsky.

BOOK NOTE

At last we have an inside story of what goes on in that netherworld to which censorship has retreated: the Code and Rating Administration which gives films their fatal X's, GP's, and R's. *The Movie Rating Game*, by Stephen Farber (our Los Angeles Editor) has just been published by the Public Affairs Press, 419 New Jersey Avenue S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003 (\$4.50). It is a personal and detailed account of Farber's six harrowing months as an "intern" (with Estelle Chngas) on the rating board. Like Shaw refusing not to speak evil of a deceased British censor, whose career was "one long folly and panic," Farber documents the board's origins, confusions, systematic interference with film-making behind the scenes, exaggerated delicacy about sex coupled with complacency about violence, and isolation from the industry's only remaining regular customers—the young viewers whose intelligence, sensitivity, and experience the board systematically insults. Farber notes the current board tendency for repressive "psychoanalysis" to rush in where religion no longer treads, and makes some sensible and moderate suggestions on how the board and its functions should be overhauled. Recommended reading, especially for anyone tempted to believe that the rating system has "solved" the censorship problem.

—E. C.